

THE GULL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 98 NO. 3 SUMMER 2013



WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

BY JILL ADAMS, DEBBIE ADAMS

Wetlands are the most productive natural systems on earth. They provide a home for a vast array of plants and animals, and they play a crucial role in the global carbon cycle. In the United States, wetlands are found in every state, and they cover more than 100 million acres.

In February, 500,000 people gathered in San Francisco to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Wetlands of International Importance. The event was a testament to the importance of these vital ecosystems.

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Teens in the new GGAS high school program (a partnership with the East Oakland Boxing Association) visited Arrowhead Marsh and planted upland natives.

BIRDATHON SETS NEW HIGH MARK

BY MIKE LYNES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year's Birdathon was our most successful to date, with more than 70 participants and 450 donors generating \$47,000 to support GGAS programs!

None of this could have happened without volunteers—in particular, Della Dash and her hardworking crew who helped set the rules, recruit participants, and solicit corporate sponsors. Board member Alan Harper and his wife, Carol Baird, opened their beautiful hillside home for this year's Birdathon awards celebration. Our field trip

leaders chipped in with their outstanding naturalist skills, including Rusty Scalf, who won Best Bird prize for sighting California Condors at Pinnacles National Park.

But Birdathon is about more than prizes and trips. The money raised is essential for our work protecting and educating about Bay Area wildlife. It ensures that we can continue fighting for the California Least Terns in Alameda and the Golden Eagles and Burrowing Owls in Altamont Pass.

Birdathon donations also ensure that we

can partner with other Audubon chapters on important emerging issues around the bay. For example, in May GGAS joined Madrone and Marin Audubon, Native Songbird Care and Conservation, and the Animal Legal Defense Fund in a lawsuit to stop Caltrans' needless and inhumane slaughter of Cliff Swallows nesting in Petaluma.

The Petaluma swallow deaths are an unhappy reminder of the lack of consideration that wildlife receive from state and local agencies. In this case, Caltrans illegally installed nets that were intended to stop swallows from nesting on a bridge near a highway expansion site. Instead, the swallows became trapped by the nets and died from exposure, dehydration, and predation. Caltrans refused to remove the nets, and state and federal wildlife agencies failed to take action—leaving us no recourse other than going to court.

Birdathon also contributes to the success of our Eco-Education program, which just wrapped up its 14th year of providing free environmental education and field trips to 700 elementary school students in low-income areas of Richmond, East Oakland, and San Francisco. This spring featured the launch of our new high school program in East Oakland that introduces teens to the ecosystems of areas like Arrowhead Marsh.

Our other big news is that the GGAS office has moved! We are only one door down from our last location and were able to complete the move with the help of our great office volunteers. We're still getting settled, so drop by and say hello.

Dan Murphy Wins 2013 Elsie Roemer Award

Longtime GGAS leader Dan Murphy has been awarded this year's Elsie Roemer Conservation Award. Dan was a founder of the San Francisco Christmas Bird Count and has co-led that count for decades. He has been a GGAS board member, field trip leader, and advocate for birds and their habitats at Lake Merced, on Ocean Beach, and in Golden Gate Park. Since Dan could not receive his award in person, we will hold a reception in his honor later this year. Stay tuned for date and details.

Elsie Roemer (1893–1991) was an educator and activist who successfully worked to protect wetlands in Alameda. The Elsie Roemer Bird Sanctuary in Alameda is named in her honor.

Dave Quady Wins 2013 Paul Covel Award

This year's Paul Covel Conservation Education Award was given to Dave Quady. Dave teaches a class on owls that is consistently one of our most popular offerings and engages both new and experienced birders. Author of the owls section for the *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America*, Dave has led GGAS trips to sites including Yosemite and Eagle Lake. He is a longtime co-compiler of the Oakland Christmas Bird Count and a leader of Western Field Ornithologists.

Paul Covel (1909–1990) was a park naturalist and educator who inspired many children and adults through his pioneering interpretive programs at Lake Merritt. He was a recipient of the 1989 Elsie Roemer Award.



Bob Gunderson/www.flickr.com/photos/bobgunderson

BUENA VISTA PARK

BY KIMBERLY JANNARONE

The rewards of patch-birding became apparent quickly.

Buena Vista is San Francisco's oldest official park (1867), and it earns its name. It's a hilltop forest, with winding trails and views in all directions. On a clear day, you can see the Golden Gate Bridge, the Pacific Ocean, and Alcatraz, as well as the Bay Bridge and Mount Diablo. While gazing at the view, you'll also notice a steady stream of birds cruising by. Pay closer attention, and you'll see that quite a few of them are nesting, making this urban forest their home.

The park's oak woodlands and shrubby understory entice many birds to set up shop. In the spring, a little patience yields views of parent birds bringing food to their young, including Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Pygmy Nuthatches, Dark-eyed Juncos, Bushtits, Brown Creepers, Hutton's Vireos, Mourning Doves, and Western Scrub-Jays. Standing in a small cluster of oaks, you can observe a Hutton's Vireo sing its sweet warbling song, grab a bright green caterpillar, bash it against a branch, sing again, and disappear. From underneath a tall redwood or an old eucalyptus, you may hear the sweet, high song of a Brown Creeper, and then spy it ferrying up the trunk a cluster of tiny black bugs in its slender, curved bill.

Both Allen's and Anna's hummingbirds nest in Buena Vista. The central hill is an ideal place to watch their aerial displays. Pine Siskins nest high in the Monterey pines, Song Sparrows in the weedy ravine on the north side, Downy Woodpeckers in the oaks, and White-crowned Sparrows near Haight Street. Hooded Orioles nest in palms close to the park and bring their young to forage in the oaks near the southern boardwalk.

I moved to Duboce Triangle in 2009 and got into city birding the next year. I make the steep hike up to the park regularly, and local birders have informed me that Buena Vista is my "patch." The rewards of patch-birding became apparent quickly.

Buena Vista is wonderfully located and pleasantly secluded. Before I moved here, tales of typical urban woes abounded, but a recent renovation—native plantings and new boardwalks—seems to have mitigated much of this. While listening to the wrens chattering in the brambles by the path, you can watch for kestrels, hawks, swifts, and swallows hunting between Buena Vista and Corona Heights. As I've discovered, birding the patch pays off.

The park spans the hill between San Francisco's lower Haight Street and Buena Vista Avenue. More information and a map: <http://sfrecpark.org/destination/buena-vista-park/>. For a longer, more detailed version of Kimberly's article, go to www.goldengateaudubon.org/blog.



Bob Gunderson/www.flickr.com/photos/bobgunderson

Pygmy Nuthatch (top) and Bushtit (top of page), two of many species that nest in the park. View from Buena Vista Park (above).

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.



Monarch butterfly.

Liam O'Brien

SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE FALKLANDS

BOB LEWIS

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, July 18
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Come with Bob Lewis to South Georgia Island, a four-day voyage by sea east of the southernmost city in the world. There, you will be introduced to the island's abundant wildlife: hundreds of thousands

Bob Lewis/www.flickr.com/photos/boblewis



King Penguins.

of penguins, thousands of albatross, uncountable fur and elephant seals, giant petrels, sheathbills, and skuas. Bob will show the large size of the breeding colonies and the spectacular surrounding landscape. He will also touch on the history of the islands, including the voyage of Ernest Shackleton, and will make a stop at the Falkland Islands to experience additional fascinating species.

Bob Lewis, chair of the GGAS Adult Education Committee and longtime popular GGAS instructor and field trip leader, is known for his portfolio of wildlife photography reflecting his travels to birding hotspots around the world. He is also a coordinator of the Oakland Christmas Bird Count.

2013 GGAS ANNUAL MEETING

You Are Invited!

Golden Gate Audubon will hold our annual membership meeting on Thursday, July 18, at 6:30 p.m., immediately prior to the Speaker Series presentation in Berkeley. Join us to hear the latest on our conservation initiatives, including bird-safe building standards in Oakland, the Alameda Wildlife Refuge, and the Caltrans swallow lawsuit, as well as an update on GGAS's organizational plans for the coming year. Share your ideas. And then stay for Bob Lewis's talk.

A TALE OF TWO CITY BUTTERFLIES

LIAM O'BRIEN

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, August 15
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

The small county of San Francisco has 34 breeding species of butterflies. For lepidopterist Liam O'Brien, every one of these urban survivors has a remarkable story. Liam will focus on the county's two largest butterfly species: the Western Tiger Swallowtail and the Monarch. Remarkably, the former, perhaps the most celebrated butterfly on the planet, has adapted to the city's grandest boulevard: Market Street. Liam will also talk about the legislation proposed to protect these species within the county.

Liam O'Brien surveyed the entire county of San Francisco in 2007 and again in 2009. He proposed the idea of the highly successful Green Hairstreak Project to Nature in the City in 2008. His first book (coauthored with GGAS member Matthew Zlatunich), *The Butterflies of San Francisco*, was published by the Presidio Trust.

FREEWAY BIRDING

HARRY FULLER

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, September 19
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Harry Fuller will visit some of the best birding spots within 20 minutes' drive of I-5 and feeder routes between San Francisco and Oakland on the south and Seattle on the north. This drive of 800-plus miles passes numerous wildlife refuges, state and local parks, a wilderness area, a national monument, and several national forests. It also provides access to a great range of woodpeckers from Lewis's to White-headed, a mix of habitats from savanna to rain forest, and elevations from sea level to more than 10,000 feet.

A longtime member of GGAS, Harry Fuller has led numerous field trips in the Bay Area. Now living in Ashland, Oregon, he leads trips for Point Reyes Bird Observatory and Partnership for International Birding, as well as GGAS, and serves as private guide for birders along the Pacific Slope. He is the author of *Freeway Birding* (<http://freewaybirding.com/>).



Acorn Woodpecker.

Harry Fuller

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

CONTINUED from page 1

The Ramsar Convention, named after the city in Iran where it was signed in 1971, is an international treaty aimed at promoting wetland biodiversity and conservation. Being named a Ramsar site can provide a leg up when Bay Area agencies compete against other regions for federal conservation dollars. While the designation doesn't carry any "teeth" such as tougher pollution rules, it offers symbolic clout in the never-ending fight to protect local wildlife and habitat.

"Ramsar reminds people of the significance of this estuary," says Beth Huning, coordinator of San Francisco Bay Joint Venture, the public-private partnership that oversaw the Ramsar application. "It's a call to continue to protect what we've got. It reminds us that we have a treasured resource that is recognized internationally."

Ramsar focuses specifically on wetlands: tidal areas that are inundated on a regular basis and thus develop unique saline-resistant plants. Because so much of the bay has been developed, policymakers sometimes seem to forget that we still have valuable wetlands, from Breuner Marsh in Richmond to the South Bay salt ponds.

The bay's designation was decades in the making. Officials applied twice before but were stymied by political opposition and the difficulty of getting buy-in from multiple landowners.

This time, Joint Venture delegated a lot of the legwork to Audubon California, which assembled data to support the application. Ecologist Mike Perlmutter, a GGAS member, pulled together studies whose data show the significance of the bay and its habitat.

The bay accounts for 77 percent of California's remaining estuarine habitat. It is home to 21 animal and five plant species listed as threatened or endangered by federal or state government.

It's an important site for 500 species of aquatic invertebrates and more than 130 species of fish.

It hosts more wintering and migrating shorebirds than any other estuary along the U.S. continental coast. Annual waterfowl counts average more than 200,000 birds. Seasonal hotspots such as San Leandro Bay



Sarah Thompson/www.sarahthompsonphoto.com

GGAS Director Mike Lynes (left) and Mark Rauzon, seabird biologist and a contributor to the 2011 report "The State of the Birds, San Francisco Bay," at the event celebrating the Ramsar designation.

The bay hosts more wintering and migrating shorebirds than any other estuary along the continental coast.

regularly hold more than 20,000 waterfowl.

The bay is home to more than half of all Pacific Flyway wintering diving ducks, including 49 percent of the scaup population. It regularly supports more than 1 percent of the population of 23 bird species, including Double-crested Cormorant, Ruddy Duck, California Clapper Rail, and Least Tern.

"For a site to be designated in Ramsar, it has to meet one of nine criteria," Perlmutter said. "The bay passed all nine criteria—often on multiple counts."

With Ramsar recognition finally won, what are the next steps to protect this stunning natural resource? Defending parts of the bay that are under development pres-

sure. Restoring wetlands that have been compromised in the past. Staving off the ongoing threats of pollution and invasive species. And—not least of all—trying to preserve wetland habitat from the uncertain effects of climate change.

"The great thing about Ramsar designation is that it looks at bay wetlands as a system rather than as individual wetlands, which is something that has been lacking," says GGAS Executive Director Mike Lynes. "We tend to look at individual pieces such as the Richmond shoreline. Ramsar encourages us to look at the bay as a whole, the way the birds look at it."

Ramsar nomination form: <http://tinyurl.com/mrtvtj3>.



Least Terns.

Verne Nelson/www.pbse.com/vnelson

DONATIONS

Thank you all—both general donors and supporters of Birdathon 2013—for your generous commitment to Golden Gate Audubon's programs and to the protection of Bay Area wildlife!

Donations from March 1 to May 31, 2013

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(\$1,000 and above)

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Birdathon awards celebration hosts Carol Baird (left) and Alan Harper, with Carey Knecht, GGAS board president. Photo by Peter Maiden



Dave Quady presents Rusty Scalf with Best Bird of Birdathon 2013, for sighting California Condors at Pinnacles National Park. Photo by Peter Maiden



Birdathon awards celebration, held May 19. Photo by Peter Maiden



GGAS volunteer Marjorie Blackwell greets attendees at the Birdathon awards celebration. Photo by Peter Maiden



Pat Bacchetti accepts an award for the Oakland Ouzels Birdathon team from GGAS Executive Director Mike Lynes. Photo by Peter Maiden

GIFTS IN HONOR OF

Lois Hirsch, in honor of Dan Harris
Leah Hofkin, in honor of Bob Tolena & Juli Chamberlin
Janelle Kellman, in honor of Ian Kellman
Anonymous, in honor of Chris Okon
Shauna Pickett-Gordon, in honor of Chris Okon
Matthew Tanner, in honor of Bob Toleno & Juli Chamberlin
Nancy Tivol, in honor of Louise Harm, Cora Tivol & Jacqueline Craig
Mark Welther, in honor of Alan Harper & Carol Baird

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Anonymous, in memory of Murphy
Anonymous, in memory of Charles Lynes
Anonymous, in memory of Millie Bennett
Berkeley Garden Club, in memory of Millie Bennett
Marjorie Blackwell, in memory of Bill Drum
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Jan O'Leary, in memory of Ben Niehaus
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IN-KIND GIFTS

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The Trust of Bei Brown
Connie Cloak & Chris Carrieri
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Birdathon coordinator Della Dash and Mike Lynes announce Birdathon award winners. Photo by Peter Maiden



Field trip leaders Anne Hoff and Rich Cimino. Photo by Peter Maiden

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

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3 Bay Area Hotspot:

Buena Vista Park, San Francisco

Discover an urban oasis with nesting songbirds and fly-over raptors, plus panoramic views.

4 Speaker Series

July: Bob Lewis on the birdlife and marine mammals of South Georgia and the Falklands. August: Liam O'Brien on how two charismatic butterfly species have adapted to life in San Francisco. September: Harry Fuller's tour of the many bird-rich parks and refuges easily accessible from I-5.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Alan Wight/www.sonic.net/~shwand

Eurasian Collared-Dove.

DOVES AND PIGEONS

BY ILANA DEBARE

Like the late comedian Rodney Dangerfield, the common urban pigeon might justifiably complain that it “don’t get no respect.”

More people probably call them “flying rats” than their actual name of Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*). They weren’t even included in National Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count until 1973. But Rock Pigeons are part of the small, distinctive family of *Columbidae* that is currently experiencing some interesting population changes.

Here in the Bay Area, we host four species of doves and

pigeons—the Rock Pigeon, which came to North America with the first European settlers; the Band-tailed Pigeon and Mourning Dove, both of which are native species; and the recently arrived Eurasian Collared-Dove.

Eurasian Collared-Doves were unknown in the United States until a pet shop in the Bahamas set some loose in the 1970s. They arrived in Florida in the 1980s and spread west, showing up in the San Francisco CBC for the first time in 2007. The 2012 CBC found 18 collared-doves in Oakland and 132 in San Francisco.

“They’re incredibly adaptable,” says GGAS birding instructor Rusty Scalf. “They like small towns and farms. In the Central Valley, every time you pull into a small town, you see collared-doves.”

Mourning Doves are one of the most widespread birds in the United States. But their local presence is wavering: the average number of Mourning Doves in the San Francisco CBC dropped from 687 in 1983–1987 to 236 in 2008–2012. “They’re not in imminent danger of becoming a lost species, but their numbers have gone down dramatically and we don’t know why,” says Dan Murphy, co-compiler of the San Francisco CBC.

Meanwhile, Band-tailed Pigeon numbers vary widely from year to year based on factors such as food availability.

All these *Columbidae* members share an unusual trait: providing “crop milk” to their chicks. This whitish fluid has a high protein and fat content like mammalian milk. But it’s completely different, made up of cells sloughed off the parent’s esophagus.

Key identifying marks: Mourning Doves are smaller and browner than Collared-Doves and have a long pointed tail. Collared-Doves are paler, with a black crescent on the neck and a rounded tail. Band-tails have yellow bills and steely blue plumage. Rock Pigeons have pink feet and white underwings.